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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Date: 17 Dec. 1982

TO: DCI

FROM:

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

I hold a favorable perception of this Administration's foreign achievements that is not, I suspect, widely shared. I've taken the liberty of writing down my thoughts in hopes that you will find them of some value. You may, of course, use the attached memo in any way you see fit.

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17 December 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: DCI

FROM:

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SUBJECT: The Overlooked Achievement

In just two years, this Administration has changed the course of history in a way that few Americans--and perhaps only a few of our own officials--have recognized.

To grasp the meaning and magnitude of this change, one needs to look beyond the daily battles, which inevitably are so frustrating and discouraging, and instead to focus on the great crisis of our age and on the status of this crisis prior to January 1981: the Cold War.

Simply put, the Cold War is a titanic struggle for global supremacy between the US and the Soviet Union. We are the world's leading power, the Soviets for decades have been working to displace us--and our two civilizations are so utterly different that it isn't possible to reach an amicable accord or to form a partnership of any sort. Either the US will continue as the world's leading power, or the Soviet Union will achieve its ambition to play this role. So repugnant is the prospect of a world dominated by the Soviet Union that a US defeat cannot be tolerated.

But as the 1970s come to a close, a powerful argument could be made--indeed, was being made with growing frequency around the world--that the US had begun an irreversible slide into history. The US economy was faltering, traditional American values were eroding, and the Western alliance was losing its impulse. Time after time the US seemed unwilling, or unable, to defend its interests or even its citizens. With appalling speed--and with more than a little help from our adversaries--the perception spread that history after all was on the side of the Soviets.

The effect of this perception in more than a few countries was to force a jumping of sides, or at least a hedging of bets. For it is a fact--rather an ugly one, to be sure, but nonetheless a fact--that in far too many countries the primary national security objective is merely to be on the winning side. Thus, as the perception spread that history would favor the Soviets, policies were set and decisions made to accommodate what appeared to be--or now had the potential to become--the next global leader. Governments abandoned their anti-Soviet rhetoric, toned down their pro-US rhetoric, withdrew support for US initiatives and began to see merit in Soviet diplomatic and commercial proposals that previously would have been dismissed outright. As fear of Moscow superseded fear of Washington, US negotiators on issues ranging from airline landing rights to tariffs found their adversaries to be more bold, less flexible, sometimes even a bit cocky. It became safe to burn our embassies and hold our diplomats hostage.

In short, as the 1970s came to a close our country had begun to take on the disheartening, dangerous trappings of a lame duck. History leaves no doubt what future lay in store. Had this trend continued, within just a few years the US would have ceased to be a superpower and become, instead, merely a large country. We--and everyone else--would soon have been at Moscow's mercy.

Then came the election of November 1980. The promise of the Reagan campaign was to restore our country's economic health, to celebrate and strengthen our traditional values, to revitalize the Western alliance, and to actively defend US interests around the world.

That the Reagan Administration has begun to fulfill its promise is now obvious. Fear that our economy would collapse has given way to widespread anticipation of a powerful, sustained recovery. The current debate among economists and business executives swirls around the question of whether the coming boom will start toward the beginning of 1983 or toward the end. Talk about the decline of our traditional values has virtually ceased. Patriotism and family life are back in fashion, and those who do not share these values are now recognized for the tiny minority they have always been. And the Western alliance, for the first time in years, is being genuinely led by its strongest member. The emergence of a sensible, coordinated Western economic policy toward the Soviet Union--slow and sloppy as the process may be--is a remarkable first achievement, especially in so short a period of time.

Our willingness to defend US interests around the world is now a fact of global politics. We are modernizing our strategic arsenal, building up our conventional forces, making imaginative use of our economic leverage, and talking back to those who speak ill of us. We are working hard for peace in southern Africa, we have seized the initiative in the Mideast, and we are standing up to the Soviets and their proxies in Central America.

The impact of all this--on our allies, on our adversaries, on everyone in between--has been electrifying. The perception that our country's day is done, and that history after all is on the side of the Soviets, has simply evaporated. Some governments that had jumped sides have begun sending signals that they would like to jump back. Some governments that had begun to hedge their bets are now scrambling to hedge their hedges. In capitals throughout the world, policymakers once again are taking Washington's views into account before reaching decisions that could affect US vital interests.

Obviously, much remains to be done. The unemployment rate is appalling. There continue to be profound differences of opinion among the US, Western Europe, and Japan. (We should, however, keep in mind that some differences are inevitable and healthy, and that other current differences reflect the shock of determined US leadership after years of draft.) We are still a long way from peace in southern Africa, the Mideast will remain a powderkeg for years to come, and our efforts in Central America have staved off defeat but not yet brought victory. The propaganda war continues to rage. And most threatening of all, Soviet military power continues to grow.

It is too soon to say whether this Administration will succeed in all its specific endeavors. To the extent that success comes at all, it will come slowly and as the result of prudent, skillful management. Nasty bumps along the way are inevitable, and each one will be seized upon as evidence of failure. In some cases, the critics may well be right. From time to time, we will need to shift course as swiftly and as adroitly as we can.

What is possible to say now--indeed, what needs to be said--is that by stopping our country's slide and changing the global perception of this slide, this Administration has created an environment in which success is possible. It would be a mistake to exaggerate this achievement. It would be a bigger mistake to overlook it.



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